DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 347 837 FL 020 508

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TITLE Meeting the Challenge of Language Diversity. An Evaluation of California Programs for Pupils with Limited Proficiency in English.
PUB DATE Feb 92
NOTE 6p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (73rd, San Francisco, CA, April 20-24, 1992).
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Secondary Education; *English (Second Language); *Instructional Effectiveness; *Limited English Speaking; Program Evaluation; Public Policy; *State Programs; *Statewide Planning; *Student Evaluation
IDENTIFIERS *California

ABSTRACT

A 2-year study of California's programs for elementary and secondary school students with limited English proficiency (LEP) found that the state's explosion of LEP students has led to significant classroom innovations. Some elementary schools with large numbers of students from one non-English language have developed bilingual programs allowing students to make the transition to English instruction while keeping abreast of the core curriculum. Researchers selected 15 "exemplary" elementary schools which had implemented one of five program models: bilingual late exit, bilingual early exit, double immersion, sheltered English, and English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) pull-out. More difficulty was found in covering the curriculum at adequate skill levels in schools with children from many language and cultural groups, but some have developed exemplary approaches, particularly when using the children's native languages as much as possible. However, despite instructional advances, state policy has lagged in establishing a coherent method for assessing the academic progress of students in the different instructional models, with the result that the schools can not be held accountable for LEP students' progress and the effectiveness of the models themselves can not be evaluated. Eight recommendations are offered on the basis of the research team's findings. (MSE)

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MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF LANGUAGE DIVERSITY

AN EVALUATION OF CALIFORNIA PROGRAMS FOR PUPILS WITH LIMITED PROFICIENCY IN ENGLISH

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Presented at AERA 1992

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MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF LANGUAGE DIVERSITY
A Statewide Examination of Programs for LEP Students

California is experiencing an unparalleled explosion of its non-English speaking students that has lead to exciting innovations in classrooms across the state. While the extraordinary diversity of California's school population presents challenges that must be met daily in the classroom, exemplary elementary schools with large numbers of students from one non-English language have developed bilingual programs that allow students to make the transition to English instruction while keeping pace with the state's core curriculum. Teachers in schools with children from many language and cultural groups have more trouble covering the curriculum at adequate skill levels, but some exemplary schools developed outstanding approaches, particularly when they used the children's native language as much as possible. Despite the exciting strategies being developed in the schools, state policy has lagged behind. More basically, the state has no coherent method for assessing the academic progress of students in the different models of instruction implemented--and often improvised—at school sites. Consequently the schools cannot be held accountable for LEP students' progress, and the true effectiveness of the several pedagogical models cannot be accurately determined.

These are among the major conclusions of a two-year study called for by the State Legislature, for which the Department of Education contracted with BW Associates of Berkeley, in conjunction with the National Center for Research on Cultural Diversity and Second Language Learning at UC Santa Cruz, and the Center for Education Finance and Policy at the American Institutes for Research of Palo Alto.

Researchers selected 15 "exemplary" elementary schools from about 130 nominated by county offices of education, universities, and organizations interested in the education of LEP students. The schools chosen represented well-implemented examples of one of five program models: Bilingual Late Exit, Bilingual Early Exit, Double Immersion, Sheltered English, and ESL Pull-out. The small sample was also chosen to represent the wide variation in conditions such as school and district size, location (urban/rural, north/south) and in the LEP population—its percentage of the student body, whether it was transient or stable, whether the students were from one language group or spoke multiple languages. The researchers sought to document the demographic realities of the California school system, to describe the implementation of the five models in schools and some of the factors that made them successful, to identify crucial issues of program design and implementation, and to present policy recommendations to the legislature.

Impact of the Demographic Revolution

Most California teachers already know that the classroom full of English-speaking students is a thing of the past: between 1985 and 1990, language-minority student enrollment grew four times as fast as overall enrollment. Nearly one million children, or 18 to 19 percent of the state's K-12 students, are now classified as LEP. While this demographic upheaval presents an educational challenge in and of itself, the report explains that the most recent waves of immigration have led to "diversity within diversity." For example, while about three quarters of LEP students speak Spanish (a proportion that has remained relatively constant over time), an influx of immigrants from distinct countries and cultures in Latin America is reflected in a student population with widely varying educational, social, and experiential backgrounds. The remaining one quarter of LEP students are extraordinarily diverse, speaking more than 100 different languages.

Nor does the challenge to schools end there: population movements are unpredictable, meaning that schools may enroll students at all times of the year, that students often change schools, and that schools may enroll a succession of non-English language groups within a very short time. One of the study schools, for example, developed a bilingual program for Spanish-speaking LEP students, but then had to teach an unexpected influx of Russian and Afghan children. To their credit, the staff at the school developed innovative strategies to adapt to that change.

Resources for teaching these students—specialized staff, staff training, and curriculum—have not been allocated in proportion to the new demands placed on the school system. Nearly all California teachers will have LEP students in their classes, but training for most teachers does not teach them to understand how students acquire a second

language, how to teach LEP students to write in English, or how generally to respond to the challenge of language diversity in their classrooms. The researchers found that the state is currently spending about the same amount on LEP classes that it provides for mainstream ones, despite the manifestly greater needs of LEP students.

What works?

The study team pointed to inadequate, unsystematic, and inappropriate assessment instruments and fragmentary data as obstacles to evaluating the performance of educational models for LEP students. Until this situation is corrected, policymakers and educators alike will operate in a realm of unacceptable uncertainty, and the schools cannot be made accountable for the progress of their population of LEP children. Oral proficiency tests are not generally comparable, the researchers found, and CTBS—a commonly used standardized (and comparable) achievement test—was often administered inconsistently to LEP pupils, either because the schools did not choose to do it, or because student transiency limited the size of the tested population. For the study, researchers relied on the recommendations of experts and teachers, their own assessment of design coherence and vision, investigations of available data on students, and their experiences in classroom visits.

Partly because of the paucity of assessment, and partly because schools have chosen different LEP education models based on their demographic conditions and resources—and then adapted the models—the researchers did not recommend a "best" approach to educating LEP children. Similarly, the researchers held that a choice between *approaches*—often dichotomized into those using the native language of the students or those teaching in English—would lead to oversimplification of the real-world complexities of educating diverse LEP students in resource-scarce schools. Rather, they summarized some of the costs and benefits of each under different demographic conditions: 1) whether the LEP student population spoke one non-English language or several; 2) the concentration of LEP students in the district or school; 3) the stability of the LEP population.

The researchers found that bilingual programs (Bilingual Late Exit, Bilingual Early Exit, and Double Immersion, also called Dual Immersion and Two-Way Bilingual) give students most access to the subject curriculum. They noted, on the basis of classroom observations, that classes using native language instruction tend to operate at higher skill levels than those using the other two program models (Sheltered English, ESL Pull-out). And finally, native-language models make it easier to involve parents in their children's education.

On the other hand, Sheltered English and ESL Pull-out programs may be more appropriate under certain conditions. When a school is teaching multiple language groups, and when an insufficient number of bilingual teachers are available, English-based models may be the best alternative. Some schools have developed innovative designs to cope with their combinations of needs and resource shortages. For example, two have complemented ESL Pull-out programs with native-language instruction by aides or teachers; one school adopted a Bilingual Early Exit program to concentrate the limited number of appropriately trained bilingual teachers in the early grades. The study team found that local districts adapt and combine program strategies to meet the diverse needs of their students.

Preschool programs in the students' primary languages were found to be highly advantageous: first, LEP students have an "extra" year of language-rich environment which may shorten the time until their reclassification; second, LEP students enter kindergarten ready to participate more fully in the curriculum. Three of the 15 deeply-studied schools had such preschool programs in place. Teachers, administrators, and parents interviewed at the sites agreed that preschools, using the students native language as much as possible, were fundamental to their programs.

The researchers concluded that universally high-quality education for LEP students will require appropriate action at the state level (see their recommendations below). However, their report suggests that certain attitudes and approaches can enhance educational quality even under present conditions.

- *Flexibility* is a necessity, given the extraordinary mobility of the population among both individuals and language groups; the exemplary schools sometimes offered multiple program options at the same school, or different strategies within the same program, to meet the needs of their students.

- *Coordination* strategies can maximize the use of scarce resources and improve outcomes for students. Exemplary schools

involved teachers in implementation decisions on a schoolwide basis, and enabled them to work together in teams, sharing planning and teaching assignments. Researchers reported, however, that the critical reclassification from Limited English Proficient status to "fluent," and the leap from elementary to secondary school, are not coordinated in most schools and districts—a significant problem, since these transitions are often difficult for LEP students.

- *Cultural validation* in a school helped to enhance LEP students' participation in classroom activity, student initiation of inquiries, and the general skill level observed by the researchers in classroom visits. Faculty validated their students' heritage through incorporating materials and discussions that build on the students' cultural traditions and history as well as the experiences of the students in their communities.

- *A Shared vision* or coherent sense of who the students were and what they hoped to accomplish held by a school's principal, staff, aides, parents, and community made it easier to manage strains such as limited resources or even a lack of support from the school board.

Secondary Schools

The researchers carried out an exploratory study of secondary schools. Twenty-seven of them were surveyed by telephone and five received site visits. The findings for secondary schools point up particularly serious issues for the approximately 250,000 secondary LEP students, many of whom do not have access to the core courses in math, science, social studies, etc. they need to graduate. Only six of the 27 surveyed secondary schools gave LEP students access to the full core curriculum. Appropriate textbooks and materials are scarce; the shortage of secondary teachers for these students, "critical." The departmentalized structure and scheduling complexities of secondary schools make the need for additional teachers especially acute. In addition, these students suffer from the absence of appropriate theoretical models of second language acquisition at their age level, and from the departmentalized structure and scheduling complexities of secondary schools.

Recommendations

The research team's recommendations are derived closely from their findings, which focused both on the needs of programs as well as on their strengths discovered throughout the course of the study.

♦ *The state should disseminate information about adaptations and approaches applicable in different demographic conditions.* The team recommends the establishment of a set of local networks, perhaps under the auspices of county departments of education, which would enable school staffs to benefit from the knowledge of practitioners. Site visits, special workshops, and locally produced materials and videotapes demonstrating effective program adaptations and implementation strategies may be more meaningful than traditional presentations of LEP education models divorced from any context.

♦ *Teaching credentials for language and classroom teachers alike should incorporate requirements for training in assessing, understanding and capitalizing on cultural and linguistic diversity.* Some LEP students receive special instruction from specially trained staff—but many do not. For their teachers, and for the vast majority of teachers who will encounter diversity in their classrooms, professional understanding of the language acquisition process and strategies for teaching LEP students are essential. Teachers should also be taught how to assess LEP students' performance.

♦ *The state should develop a set of assessment measures that will truly chart the educational progress of LEP students, enable teachers to diagnose their needs, and include these students in the state's accountability structure.* The researchers recommend that SB 662 (1991), which revised the state's assessment procedures, be amended to 1) waive the requirement that LEP students take the statewide tests or 2) to establish alternative, authentic assessment tools in students' native languages. Systematic reviews of individual LEP students—when they are reclassified and when they go from elementary to secondary school—should be undertaken by schools and districts, perhaps using "portfolios" to show students' progress.

♦ *The state should place a high priority on providing appropriate preschools for LEP children.* The evidence of preschool effectiveness (given appropriate design and extensive use of the students' native language) described in the literature was borne out by the present study. The state should attempt to link any new preschool programs to schools with high percentages of LEP students, and actively encourage families to participate in them. Existing state

preschools, especially those serving LEP students, should be coordinated with elementary schools.

♦ *The state should provide increased funding for materials for elementary- and secondary-level language minority students.* The scarcity of materials in languages other than English is most pronounced for LEP students in grades 9-12, but K-8 students who speak languages other than Spanish are also disadvantaged. More than any other factor, insufficient materials limit access to core subjects like math, science and social studies.

The state should try to remedy the shortage immediately by reviewing suitable books from other countries and materials developed by districts, as well as English- and primary-language materials from U.S. publishers; the results of the review should be disseminated. Quantity purchases to lower costs could be made by county offices and/or the state.

Over the longer term, the state should take the lead by pooling demand among districts to create an economic incentive for publishers, and by establishing forums in which practitioners could discuss their needs with textbook developers.

♦ *The state should facilitate research to develop principles and practices for effective education of LEP students at the secondary level.* Education of LEP students at the elementary level has benefitted from years of research, well-developed theoretical models, and experience in classroom implementation. Much less is known about the special needs and learning processes of adolescents, and about the appropriateness of techniques now used. The high dropout rates of LEP secondary students call for both basic research and examination of existing models.

♦ *The legislature should promote systematic reform—"restructuring"—in schools with high percentages of LEP students.* The techniques recommended by the research team for working with LEP students—including team teaching, collaborative decision-making, parental involvement, and articulated preschools—are, in combination, some characteristics of "restructured" schools. SB 1274 provided demonstration funding for a number of such schools; the researchers recommend that additional funding for restructured schools be directed to schools with a high percentage of LEP students. Under this recommendation, schools would be given incentives to demonstrate the feasibility and effectiveness of restructuring for schools enrolling the LEP students. While many of the schools observed in the present study had adopted one or more of the recommended features, the research team concluded that "bolder steps are needed for LEP students to make truly exceptional progress."

♦ *The state should increase state funding for programs and services for LEP students, and review current funding mechanisms.* Existing funding levels are not only insufficient, but unstable; funds for supplemental services for LEP students come from many funding streams. District general funds account for 22 percent of supplemental LEP student services, 13 percent comes from state EIA/LEP funds, and the rest comes from other categorical funds. The research team believes that district budgets are already overstressed, and that an increase in state categorical funding would relieve some of the burden on districts and make funding more reliable. In addition, the EIA/LEP funding formula should be reviewed to eliminate present disincentives to reclassification of students (funding levels are based on the number of LEP students in the district the previous year).

Finally, the research team suggested that more money for teacher training and classroom aides would be cost-efficient ways to improve education in LEP classrooms. Aides assist students in their native languages and permit teachers to organize small-group activities—especially useful in multiple-language classrooms.

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In published form, the study findings are contained in five separate volumes under the general title of *Meeting the Challenge of Cultural Diversity*. Individual volumes can be ordered from BW Associates at 815 Allston Way, Berkeley, CA 94710, or call (510) 843-8574 for more information. The cost per volume is as follows:

Volume I, *Executive Summary* (30 pages) $4.50
Volume II, *Findings and Conclusions* (233 pages) $16.00
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